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AUTHOR Roberson, Donald N., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy asserts that adult learners learn differently from younger learners and hence require a different kind of education. According to Knowles, andragogy is characterized by the following hallmarks: adult learners are self-directed, have accumulated vast experiences that add to their knowledge, are at a stage in life where they are ready to learn, engage in problem-centered learning, and are internally motivated. Andragogy not only captures the beginning of the adult education movement but also provides a perspective that is timeless and applies to adult education in a multicultural world. Several aspects of andragogy have nevertheless been contested. Some have suggested that Knowles' concept of andragogy reflects a white, male, Western orientation on life and learning rather than the individual webs of cultural significance and have challenged adult educators to move beyond the separatist ideas of andragogy and incorporate culturally responsive teaching in a culturally plural world. The following are among the actions that critics of Knowles' theory of andragogy have advised adult educators to take: (1) incorporate issues of diversity and culture into ways of knowing; (2) move beyond the family and focus on the social, economic, and political system of the learner's world; and (3) emphasize indigenous education. (MN)

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Donald N. Roberson, Jr.

EADU 9020

Cassie Drennon, Facilitator

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Andragogy in Color

The purpose of this paper is to understand the perspective of Malcolm Knowles and his ideas on adult education. The author will show that andragogy not only captures the beginning of the adult education movement, but its perspective is timeless and applies to adult education in a multicultural world. This paper consists of three parts, first a summary of andragogy, second, the contested aspects of andragogy, and third how andragogy is still appropriate for today's adult education.

Summary of Andragogy.

Malcolm Knowles was involved in adult education before it was named. He was ardently attempting to educate young adults in vocational skills in a time when television was black and white. During this time, many things were black and white. Knowles could sense there was a specific difference in educating adults than children; he began to search for information that could help isolate this phenomena. After a series of work experiences, returning to school, the influence of Eduard Lindeman and Cyril Houle, Knowles began to verbalize his ideas about this different kind of education that worked with adults. Interestingly, a friend from Yugoslavia, said, "You are doing andragogy…." (Knowles, 1985, p. 6). Andragogy had been used as a term in Europe for years to identify education with adults (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

Since most educators are familiar with pedagogy, Knowles defined andragogy in contrast with pedagogy. He lists several hallmarks of andragogy: the learner is self-directed, the vast experiences of an adult adds to knowledge, the learner is at a stage in life where he/she is ready to learn, adult learning is problem centered, and the adult is internally motivated (Knowles, 1985). In addition, Knowles feels the facilitator of adult

learning should create a climate conducive to learning, the learner will actively participate in every phase of this process, and that each learner would have a learning contract to carry out the process (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

Contested Aspects of Andragogy.

Knowles has had pivotal impact in adult education by verbalizing conditions, methods, and issues of adult learning. However a critical reflection on his work leaves several questions. Does andragogy reflect the black and white, segregated world of Knowles' past, or is there diversity and color in andragogy? Is andragogy's emphasis on self-direction genre of white-male privilege (McIntosh, 1988)? Can andragogy be a reflection of all adult learners? Are andragogical assumptions of self-concept, self-initiative, and self-direction merely a description of Europeans? (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

The critics of andragogy assume that these ideas do not meet the criteria of culturally based education, and in fact reflect western mindset (Pratt, 1993). Culturally diverse education may be characterized by a relationship between learning and one's unique culture (Wlodowski & Ginsberg, 1995), an acknowledgement of the different ways of knowing (Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996), and the incorporation of indigenous education (Cajete, 1994). These three aspects of a diverse education will be addressed.

Knowles' perspective on adult learning seems to picture the learner as a free agent apart from the social context of one's world (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). There is the underlying theme of unlimited possibilities for the self-directed learner. Wlodowski & Ginsberg (1995) discuss how adult education must move beyond the traditional concept

of the learner and his/her immediate surrounding, and incorporate the changing cultural dynamics in our world. For example, Knowles seems to assume if the individual is motivated then they can become a self-directed learner. However, this does not incorporate other culture's relationship with motivation or various types of motivation. The authors quote Geertz (1973) as the basis of their perspective:

> The human being is an animal suspended in webs of significance she or he has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning.

In essence, andragogy reflects a white, male, western orientation on life and learning, rather than the individual webs of cultural significance. The authors suggest educators to establish inclusion, to develop attitude, to enhance meaning, and to engender competence in a holistic and systemic method of learning (Wlodowski & Ginsberg, 1995). The challenge of adult educators is to move beyond the separatist ideas of andragogy and to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in a culturally plural world.

Similarly, Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky (1995) admonish the adult educator to incorporate issues of diversity and culture into ways of knowing. Knowles' perspective is based on a positive self -concept of the learner. In addition the learner must have the motivation to become self-directed, they have a great deal of experience that adds to the learning, and there is a readiness to learn based on the development of the individual (Knowles, 1985). This seems to fit in well with middle-class family value that have the ability to offer their children opportunities that fit in with the privilege and class of the majority culture.

However, Goldberger, et al., (1995) state that the adult educator must move beyond the family and focus on the social, economic, and political system of the world of the learner. These imperatives of culture result in a variety of ways of knowing and learning.

For example, the authors suggest a variety of ways to learn, such as body knowledge, and various situational knowing which is based on the unique culture of the individual. People, who are marginalized, have to develop and construct unique ways of knowing that are different from the dominant culture. People of color, and those in the minority within a dominant white culture receive knowledge through various ways. For example, Goldberger, et al. (1995), state,

> Thus, received knowing can be passive, unquestioned, chosen, or embraced; it can be infantilizing, soothing, honored, or considered dangerous. How a culture construes external authority, the self, God, elders, shamans…affects the force and personal meaningfulness of received knowing (p. 363).

Although Knowles's perspective helped to solidify the infancy of adult education, It is time to move beyond and embrace the growing and changing child of adult learning. The linear perspective of Knowles' learning contract reflects western notions of rationality and analysis, and does not incorporate the cultural imperatives and diversity in ways of knowing.

Cajete (1994) pushes these ideas further by focusing on the importance of indigenous education. He states that indigenous education is education about life as well as the nature of the spirit. This type of education incorporates the nature of the spirit that moves us as well as the energy about us. Basing his perspective on American Indian

culture, he states there are five traditions of learning: way of life (religion), spoken words (breath), art, ritual cycles that represent the cycles of life, and nature.

Andragogy is a rational and analytic process that does not seem to incorporate the spiritual element of learning. This would seem to be in contrast to the indigenous education of American Indians because they consider the spiritual to be more significant than the intellect. From lessons from four deer, to the adventures of Scarface, the implications of Cajete (1994) is for the adult educator to empower the learner by being creative and to tap into the spiritual dynamic of one's life. Stated through the narrative is the importance of discovering nature, animals, and one's inner spirit.

Timeless Essence of Andragogy.

Although there are various contested notions within the concept of andragogy it is still a viable explanation of adult education that is useful today. Although Knowles' male dominated world of boys clubs, Eduard Lindeman, YMCA, the U.S. Navy, and Cyril Houle may have influenced his thinking; he also mentions the influence of Kirtley Mather and Dorothy Hewitt, and how their book *Adult Education* "served as my-how-to-do-it manual" (Knowles, 1985, p. 3). Even though his learning contract reflects a linear and analytic perspective of western thought; it can be a creative tool reflecting the individual needs of the learner. Self-direction and self-concept may be a value in white middle class families, yet the essence of a strong personality goes beyond culture to an individual inspiration - much like Scarface had in his approach to life and his courage to talk to the Sun God (Cajete, 1994).

Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Art is a craft, a skill, a cunning, stressing ingenuity and subtlety in attaining one's

end. Art implies creativity, a relationship between the artist, the canvas, and the object, as well as a benign sensitivity. The artistic side of andragogy can capture all the thoughts of a shaman, a silent knower, as well as a deer talking in the woods. Science implies knowledge attained through study and practice. Tracking bears, listening to the wind, and telling a story are all aspects of learning that have to be studied, rehearsed, and practiced.

In this art and science of learning there will be an interest in the individual learner that incorporates unique culture and various ways of learning. The facilitator will encourage participatory activities from learners so that one's unique situation and understanding can be incorporated into the learning process. Andragogy's informality allows the learners to be involved in their own learning experience as well as helping to set the parameters of the experience.

Knowles (1984) delineates this further in his andragogical model comprised of five tenets. First, the learner is self-directing and in charge of their education. This allows the learner to gear learning according to one's own tradition. Second, the learner's background and individual experiences are taken into consideration. Each individual's experiences will further reflect the unique culture allowing for the incorporation of his or her own lifestyle, religion, and background. Third, andragogy assumes there is a readiness to learn. The adult learner brings with them a need to know, a desire to learn something that will impact their life. Fourth, the adult learner is life-centered and task centered; adults learn within the context of work, family, community, and culture. Fifth, there is an internal motivation to learn. "Scarface," similarly, was internally motivated to learn whatever necessary to undo the spell on his future wife (Cajete, 1994). These five

assumptions are hinged on an atmosphere that encourages learning; this should further silence any other arguments against the notions of andragogy.

In summary, andragogy has been applied in a wide variety of settings and educational situations. Regardless of the postmodern trend to criticize andragogy, Knowles' perspective does not appear to be culture bound. Concepts of self-directed learning have been successfully implemented in various countries as well as socioeconomic backgrounds. The concept of andragogy has been incorporated by technical science as well as in the humanities. Interestingly, andragogy was originally defined in contrast to pedagogy, research has also shown andragogy's perspective not be age restricted. Of all the various aspects of this model, climate setting may be the most widely adopted, but self-directed learning, contract learning, individual instruction, experiential learning, process design, peer helping, self-diagnosis, and self-evaluation are prominent practices around the world in the field of education (Knowles, 1984).

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